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From Merge to Move

A Minimalist Perspective on the Design of Language and its Role in Early Child Syntax

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Perhaps the most unique of human-language properties is the existence of syntactic movement operations. The question as to why they should even appear within language has puzzled linguists ever since the conception of the generative grammar framework. A second and perhaps even more interesting question is to ask how movement operations come to be embedded within the language faculty as template structures—and whether such templates for movement take-on emergent, maturational qualities over the brief span of a child's early syntactic development.

In this monograph, assuming the current incarnation of the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995), the author has attempted to sort out what such an emergent language faculty would look like given its underdeveloped status at early syntactic stages of child language acquisition, assuming the biological null hypothesis calling for a maturational-based theory of child syntax. Namely, what types of configurations and operations would be seen at an early stage which first manifests only local Merge-based operations absent of what would become later-developed distant Move-operations? Data to be examined involve a longitudinal case study of a child, as well as other data dealing with Broca's Aphasia which may shed further light on the question.

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